

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

COPY

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

The Follen Community Church

AND/OR COMMON

Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

755 Massachusetts Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

~~5th~~ 4

STATE

Massachusetts

CODE

025

COUNTY

Middlesex

CODE

017

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☐ EDUCATIONAL☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☒ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

The Follen Church Society

STREET & NUMBER

755 Massachusetts Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Lexington

VICINITY OF

STATE

Massachusetts 02173

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

South Middlesex Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

208 Cambridge Street

CITY, TOWN

Cambridge

STATE

Massachusetts 02138

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth
Historic American Buildings Survey (MASS-590)

DATE

1967 (Mass.); 1930 (HABS)

☒ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Massachusetts Historical Commission; Washington, DC

CITY, TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Follen Community Church faces west onto Massachusetts Avenue (formerly Main Street) in East Lexington. Next to it to the south stands the Stone Building (Cary Memorial Library) and to the north is a parsonage built around 1930.

The Follen Community Church was built in 1840/41 according to designs made in 1839 by the minister, Charles Theodore Christian Follen. The building is sheathed in clapboards, and its pointed arched windows display a Gothic influence. It is octagonal in shape, resting on a heavy granite foundation. As originally designed, the only deviation from the octagon was a front vestibule surmounted by a tall steeple, the spire of which was of lattice construction.

A unique feature of the roof over the sanctuary is the incorporation of a structurally massive ceiling (with eight 14-inch square chestnut rafters) hung from the apex of the eight-sided roof by a single heavy iron rod. The pulpit, still in use, was situated on the floor of the sanctuary to allow Reverend Follen to have his congregation spread half-way around him fan-wise. The original choir loft was set in the back of the church over the vestibule with access from the steeple.

In April 1857 the steeple was damaged by fire after being struck by lightning. The lattice spire was removed until eight years later when it was rebuilt and sheathed with wooden shingles. At this time a raised chancel was added to the back of the octagon to provide space for the choir in front of the congregation and for the pulpit to be raised to a more prominent position. A kitchen was added beneath the chancel.

In 1914 a village clock was added to the steeple under the following arrangement: The steeple was to be supplied by the church, the clock was to be the property of the "Citizens of the East Village," the clock was to be maintained and wound by the East Lexington Men's Club and was to be lighted by the Town of Lexington.

The only major modification to the outside of the church occurred in 1955 when a large, low, basement-level addition was built unobtrusively at the rear behind the chancel to provide church school and meeting space. A number of internal changes in the basement space directly under the sanctuary have been made from time to time as needs demand. As recently refurbished, it now provides office and church school rooms and a small meeting room appropriately named "the Follen Room" where original portraits of both Charles and Eliza Follen are displayed on the walls.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1840-41

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Reverend Charles Follen

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Follen Community Church is significant as the first permanent home of the Religious Society of East Lexington and as the only octagonal structure in the town.

The Religious Society of East Lexington was formed in 1833 and in 1835 began holding its meetings in the Stone Building (Cary Memorial Library) in East Lexington. The pastor of the new religious society was the Reverend Charles Follen who had fled his native Germany because of opposition to his radical political activities. In America he became an ardent abolitionist before such views were acceptable in New England, and as a result he lost his position as professor of German at Harvard College. In order to give full expression to his religious, moral and political opinions, Follen turned to the ministry and preached to the Religious Society in East Lexington which was sympathetic to his views.

After four years of meeting in the Stone Building, the Society was desirous of building its own church. Follen designed the new church building which was to stand next to the hall (the Stone Building) formerly used by the worshippers, and he led the Society in conducting a fair to aid in financing the undertaking. The fair was held in August 1839 on Mt. Independence, and the proceeds amounted to about \$1200.

Ground was broken for the new church on July 4, 1840 and on January 15, 1841 the dedication was held. Dr. Follen was returning from a lecture tour to preside at the ceremonies when he was killed in the explosion of the steamship "Lexington" in Long Island Sound.

Ever since its founding in a town famous for its fight against "the establishment" on April 19, 1775, the Follen Church Society (as it is now called) has prided itself on liberal social and religious views and considers itself significant as a symbol of our democratic heritage. It continues to be an active force in Lexington's community life. The tradition of the East Village Fair, conducted each year on the church lawn, has lived on for over 125 years, making it one of the oldest yearly fairs in the area. The introduction by Follen of the German custom of Christmas to his Cambridge and Lexington neighbors is another event which the church yearly celebrates by selling Christmas trees under the rubric of the "Christmas Tree Church."

The Follen Church is the oldest church building now standing in Lexington, and together with its neighbor the Stone Building presents an important symbol of the fight of Reverend Follen and other Americans to preserve the freedoms of speech and worship.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Piper, Dr. Fred Smith. "Architectural Yesterdays in Lexington," Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society, Vol. IV, Lexington, Mass. 1912.
Smith, A. Bradford. "History of the Stone Building," Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society, Vol. II, Lexington, Mass. 1900.
Records in the home of Follen Church historian, Dr. Sanborn Brown, 37 Maple Street, Lexington, Mass.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .347 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 19 318400 46991640
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
C

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Judy D. Dobbs, National Register Editor

ORGANIZATION

Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE

November 24, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

294 Washington Street

TELEPHONE

617-727-8470

CITY OR TOWN

Boston

STATE

Massachusetts 02108

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elizabeth Reed Amador

TITLE

Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

DATE

Nov. 25, 1975

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

